

H.B. 5037 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023

February 24, 2022

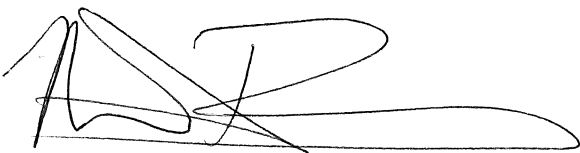
Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Nicole Reynolds, and I am a resident of Norwich, Connecticut and an employee at Reliance Health, a nonprofit community mental health organization in Norwich. I am submitting written testimony in support of **H.B. 5037 An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023.**

It would not be fair to say that community nonprofits have seen a less than 1% increase in funding since 2007. Last year we were granted a 4% increase, which was assigned to wages. This 4% increase, while appreciated, barely makes up for the 5% cut from the budget in 2017 and is far from a final solution. Even with the minimally proposed increases to the DMHAS budget, nonprofit human service providers continue to be inadequately funded. With inflation reaching over 7% this year alone, the cost to do business is threatening the sustainability of many nonprofit programs.

Reliance Health operates 3 residential homes on State property. We pay rent to the State of Connecticut on these 3 properties where we also provide residential care to 21 individuals. When we last renewed our leases on these properties in 2015 the state raised our rent by 14%. Our budget had not been adjusted to account for any rent increases. In fact, at that time, our budget had not been adjusted in 8 years. The state is supposed to be a resource, working with nonprofits to provide the highest quality of care for the residents of Connecticut. The action of denying nonprofit budget increases and then raising nonprofit rents clearly and consciously takes money away from service provision. How is any organization expected to sustain this model? If this is a problem we're having with the state as our landlord, imagine what nonprofits are facing elsewhere. Budget reductions, flat funding, and minimal percentage increases do not support a 14% increase in rent, or a 7% increase in inflation. The budgets we have been given do not support the cost of managing facilities and they do not support the very people they are structured to care for. As we wait to renew our leases at these 3 state properties, we can't help but wonder, will the state provide fair compensation to meet the expected raise in rents? If not, what will we cut to ensure we can continue to provide care to the 21 individuals served at these homes?

It is time to invest in the Department of Mental Health and Addictions Services. The cost to do business in Connecticut has significantly increased. As a result, there needs to be, at minimum, an 8% increase in the DMHAS budget. As we move away from the pandemic, the need for mental health and substance abuse treatment will continue to grow, but without increased funding the programs who provide care will cease to exist. This does not improve quality of life for the residents of Connecticut. Now is the time to invest in substantial improvements and enhancements to the behavioral health system, demonstrating a commitment to mental health – community health. Thank you for your time and attention.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Reynolds', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nicole Reynolds

